



# Protecting Women Peacebuilders

## *THE FRONT LINES OF SUSTAINABLE PEACE*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....3

Introduction.....4

Purpose and Methodology.....5

The Contextual Conditions for Insecurity.....6

The Art and Danger of Building Bridges.....6

The Nature of Threats to Women Peacebuilders.....8

Weaponization of Sexuality and Culture.....10

The Ambiguity of the Perpetrators.....10

When Peace(building) is Stigmatized.....11

Protecting Women Peacebuilders in Policy and Practice.....13

Building a Legal and Political Safety Net.....13

Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Threats on the Ground.....14

Security at the Peace Table and in International Spaces.....16

When Emergency Relocation and Assistance is Necessary.....16

Conclusions and Recommendations.....18

Operational Guidance to Establish and Enhance the Protection of Women Peacebuilders.....19



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## INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, as the United States, the United Nations, and other international actors geared up for peace talks between the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan, Afghan women peacebuilders who have dedicated their lives to seeking peace for their country received letters warning them to stay silent. In Iraq under the cover of the coronavirus, as the eyes of the international community were diverted, militias have been gaining ground. There, too, women peacebuilders are in their sights and under threat.

Activists seeking human rights, social justice, or political change have long endured threats against their lives for speaking truth to power. 25 years ago, this reality prompted a global move to establish the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>1</sup> But for those who venture into the more elusive vocation of peacebuilding, who are not referenced in international policy frameworks and thus not equally protected, the experiences and contexts are different. From Colombia to Cameroon, women peacebuilders are at great risk because of their willingness to reach across divides. The threats against them are, of course, exacerbated by misogyny and patriarchy, but for years this has not deterred them from promoting dialogue and nonviolence.

In recent years, however, conditions around the world have shifted. With the rise of extremist and militarized states and non-state movements, national and international politics have become incredibly polarized, making the middle ground for dialogue increasingly precarious and shrinking the space for civil society. If we are to stop the spiral of violence and destruction, we need to reclaim the space for dialogue and recognize those who are willing to risk their own lives for the purpose of saving others. Women peacebuilders do this every day. As others run from the problems, they run towards them, not with guns or bombast, but with humanity and compassion, seeking to understand and find shared solutions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while providing gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive humanitarian relief and public health services, women peacebuilders have also raised the alarm about people using this crisis to foment division and sow the seeds of violence. They serve their communities and contribute vitally to local, national, and global peace and security. However, this work is largely unrecognized so they remain for the most part unprotected.<sup>2</sup> As the polarization of their social and political environment grows, peacebuilders—who are key actors in de-escalating tensions and transforming conflicts—are themselves facing growing threats. This needs to change.

As Syrian peacebuilder Ghada Rifai says, “At first doing peacebuilding work on the ground was not seen as a threat, they just didn’t want us at the political level... As peacebuilders we need to mobilize at the policy level to influence change.”<sup>3</sup> While participation of and resources for women peacebuilders remain meager, the antipathy and threats from state and non-state armed groups alike have increased. This cannot be ignored as we mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security<sup>4</sup>, which called for support to women’s peace initiatives and the participation of women in peace and security decision making. So we ask a simple but pertinent question, *Who is protecting the peacebuilders?* In this brief we call for and provide guidance to ensure their safety so they can continue their lives in their communities and conduct their vital work.

1. Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, A/RES/53/144, United Nations General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, 8 March 1999, Agenda item 110 (b), <http://undocs.org/A/RES/53/144>.

2. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, MBE, Recognizing Women Peacebuilders: Critical Actors in Effective Peacemaking, International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), October 2020.

3. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

4. UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) [on women and peace and security], 31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f4672e.html>





## Purpose and Methodology

This brief and its recommendations are a synthesis of two years of consultations among women peacebuilders in the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)<sup>5</sup> from more than 40 countries affected by violent conflict and extremism, militarism, and authoritarianism, and allies in academia and government.

The safety of women peacebuilders emerged as a key concern and priority during ICAN's Annual Women, Peace and Security Forum in November 2018 and the Better Peace Symposium II in June 2019.<sup>6</sup> The need for protection was reinforced and explored through consultations during the Caux Forum "Towards an Inclusive Peace", The Carter Center's Human Rights Defenders Forum, and ICAN's Forum in 2019.

In February 2020, ICAN and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) hosted a two-day Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) workshop on the topic, bringing together local peacebuilders, human rights and protection experts, academics, and policymakers working in and on conflict around the world.<sup>7</sup> This brief draws on that workshop and is informed by the findings of ongoing dissertation research on the topic conducted by Jennifer Freeman<sup>8</sup>; ongoing action research on feminist security by the Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE) in Colombia; and the expertise of Neem Foundation in Nigeria and Justice, Human Rights, and Gender Civil Association in Mexico.

This brief distills and builds on decades of women peacebuilders' experiences navigating the dangers of their work alone. It aims to provide a collective accounting and recommend strategies to international and national stakeholders with the power and responsibility to protect women peacebuilders. It begins with an overview of the contextual factors and realities that create and exacerbate women peacebuilders' insecurity. Then it elaborates on the following key elements to lay the foundation for a framework<sup>9</sup> to protect and ensure women peacebuilders' safety:

- Existing knowledge about the range and sources of threats, including their gendered nature and the comparative experiences of women human rights defenders (WHRDs);
- Analysis of the strengths of and gaps in existing protection mechanisms at the international and national levels, including the policies and programs of states and multilateral institutions, and international and local civil society organizations, to prevent and respond to acute threats and attacks; and
- Practical guidance for states and multilateral institutions to establish and enhance protection mechanisms for women peacebuilders, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2493, while avoiding doing inadvertent harm to them, their work, and the communities and causes they serve.

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5. The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) is a key pillar of ICAN's work. WASL brings together nearly 100 women rights and peace practitioners across 30 countries, organizations, and networks who are actively engaged in preventing extremism and promoting peace, rights and pluralism, to enable their systematic and strategic collaboration. More information is available at: <https://icanpeacework.org/our-work/womens-alliance-for-security-leadership/>.

6. International Civil Society Action Network, "ICAN's Better Peace Symposium Focused on Recognition and Protection of Women Peacebuilders," May 30, 2019, <https://icanpeacework.org/2019/05/30/icans-better-peace-symposium-protection-women-peacebuilders/>.

7. International Civil Society Action Network, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders' Workshop Convened in London," March 5, 2020, <http://icanpeacework.org/2020/03/05/protecting-women-peacebuilders-workshop-london-ican/>.

8. Jennifer Freeman is the current CEO at PeaceGeeks, a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics, and the former program director at the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice's Women Peacemaker program. Freeman's current research focuses on the shifting security threats and protection measures for women peacebuilders as compared to women's human rights defenders.

9. The Women Peacebuilder Protection Framework comprises: 1) this brief summarizing what is known about the threats to women peacebuilders and analyzing their protection needs; 2) the practical guidance herein outlining what states and multilateral organizations can and should do; and 3) a pledge by state and multilateral actors to take action to protect women peacebuilders.

# THE CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS FOR INSECURITY

Women peacebuilders are the often invisible first responders in conflict and war zones who challenge those who abuse power and stand in the way of peace. As Sanam Naraghi Anderlini writes,

Peacebuilding work is risky and precarious. In highly polarized contexts where adversaries dehumanize each other, anyone willing to reach across the lines of conflict to engage in dialogue exposes themselves to mistrust from all sides, including from within their own communities.<sup>10</sup>

Women peacebuilders have deep knowledge and the trust of local communities. Yet, women peacebuilders have been systematically excluded, misunderstood, and threatened as a result of their work. In the words of peacebuilder and founder of Libyan Women Forum Shahrazad Magrabi, “We are changing mindsets, adapting to change, and facing risks. Yet, we are not recognized. Peacebuilders need to be visible and represented on national and international levels.”<sup>11</sup>

Women peacebuilders, as members of civil society, often question the current status of the relationship between the state and civil society and articulate a different vision of what the state can and should be. Ideally, states exist to provide the rule of law and security for their citizens, to govern justly with accountability to diverse groups, and to meet the basic human needs and rights of their people. Civil society has become a kind of fifth estate, as it fosters the social contract between the state and the people. However, in the face of poor governance—corruption, impunity, and lack of services—civil society fills the vacuum left by a dysfunctional state. States are increasingly restricting the space for civil society to operate, and leveraging military, intelligence, and security forces to neutralize those who question the status quo and their power. As Jennifer Freeman, CEO of PeaceGeeks and a Visiting Fellow at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, reflects:

The threats are intensifying because governments have been emboldened by one another. This is the normative effect of cracking down on civil society, global hostility to women, and rising digital insecurity.<sup>12</sup>

Women peacebuilders face enormous danger in their work as they challenge existing power structures, systems of governance, control of resources, and notions of security. At the end of the day, while peacebuilding is not partisan, it is political.

## The Art and Danger of Building Bridges

Women peacebuilders' work is essentially cross-communal, whether interethnic, interreligious, between displaced people and host societies, or between returning extremists and their home communities. Peacebuilders' use of dialogue and engagement with different parties defines their work and enables them to negotiate humanitarian access, bring actors to the peace table, challenge extremist ideologies violence, and facilitate reconciliation and social healing. However, this engagement with “the other” specifically puts them at risk, more than any other civic actors operating in a conflict zone.

Since peacebuilders depend so much on credibility and maintenance of trust of all parties in a conflict, they are more likely to be attacked, including by members of their own group, if that reputation is ever questioned. Broken trust with one group can extend to another. For example, when one Nigerian peacebuilder was ostracized by a peer organization, the government also refused to invite her to meetings.

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10. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, MBE, Recognizing Women Peacebuilders: Critical Actors in Effective Peacemaking, International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), October 2020, 7.

11. Consultations, Caux Forum “Towards an Inclusive Peace”, July 2019.

12. Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.



*"As women peacebuilders we will always dialogue with the other, it is our principle."*

*– Rosa Emilia Salamanca, CIASE, Colombia*

Stories of women peacebuilders under threat are threaded with perceived betrayal and fundamental misunderstanding of their work. This dynamic may be hard-wired in our neurology. Human beings have a fundamental need for belonging and we organize ourselves into distinct groups with shared identities to fulfil this imperative.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a member of one's group reaching out to another can be perceived as an existential threat to group cohesion. Occupying, and bridging, that uncomfortable space is the essence of what women peacebuilders do. For example, Rudina Çollaku is President and Founder of Women Center for Development and Culture in Albania. As a practicing Muslim woman working on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and community resilience, she experiences feelings of insecurity and opposition from believers within her community but also indifferent relations from law enforcement and security institutions.

Distrust of and dissatisfaction with the government has led to deep discontent in Colombia, where the multiplication of violence<sup>14</sup> and violent actors after the signing of the peace agreement has increased the risk to peacebuilders who engage state and security actors in the course of their work. Last year there were strikes in Colombia and people were very angry with the government. "As women peacebuilders we will always dialogue with the other, it is our principle," says Rosa Emilia Salamanca of CIASE, adding, "There is a risk that people will judge us for this, for talking to people that others don't like, but this is part of our work building new bridges that others will use after."<sup>15</sup>

Halfway around the world, the experience of an Indian Muslim activist echoes this, "If I'm seen as sitting with the government, I'm seen as being against my community and this brings major threats."<sup>16</sup>

13. Esra Cuhadar, Understanding Resistance to Inclusive Peace Processes (United States Institute of Peace, number 159, March 2020).

14. Colombia has witnessed, since the signing of the peace agreement, a 600% increase in the attacks on human rights defenders and peacebuilders.

15. Consultations, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders" GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

16. Ibid.

# THE NATURE OF THREATS TO WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS

Women peacebuilders face a complex matrix of risk and targeted threats to their physical, emotional, political, economic, and spiritual health and safety.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, women who are peacebuilders are threatened because of their peace work.

These threats are, of course, also gendered in nature. Defamation and harassment are more likely to take on sexual overtones, such as accusations of promiscuity or threats of rape, and to target children and other family members. According to Jennifer Freeman, women peacebuilders “are more likely to be targeted by their own group and are particularly susceptible to threats to their credibility and trust” than WHRDs.<sup>18</sup> The deliberate targeting and tarnishing of their reputations and credibility with their communities, especially through accusations of transgressing social norms in ways that are “foreign”, is the most common and devastating strategy used against women peacebuilders: Trust is their most valuable asset.

We have compiled analyses of the threats they experience to provide as comprehensive and nuanced a picture as possible. In her research, Jennifer Freeman breaks down the nature of threats to women peacebuilders on three levels: personal, organizational, and environmental.<sup>19</sup> The following table categorizes the specific threats experienced at these three levels into CIASE’s five types.

The threats listed all endanger women peacebuilders; their families, colleagues, and communities; and their peacebuilding work. In Cameroon and Iraq amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, governmental and non-governmental forces have issued death threats against and attempted kidnappings of women peacebuilders as tactics to silence them and stop their work.

If a woman peacebuilder identifies with other marginalized groups in her society, the threats compound. For example, a young, single, female and Muslim activist in India relates that while looking for a house to rent, “I’ve been told, ‘You’re Muslim and single,’” and refused explicitly on that basis.

The impact of these threats on women peacebuilders’ lives and work can be grave, insidious and mundane. Muna Luqman shares, “Many of my friends are afraid to speak with me on the phone.”<sup>20</sup> And in Afghanistan, peacebuilders and human rights defenders know not to travel, even locally, before 10:00 a.m. due to the higher likelihood of targeted attacks, often suicide bombings, taking place in the morning.

Syrian peacebuilders describe the comprehensive approach by state intelligence agencies, which not only question, attack, and detain peacebuilders but also co-opt people into reporting on one another. The experience of having a colleague report information to the regime left one peacebuilder feeling vulnerable and fearful, requiring her to re-establish the sense of trust and safety within her own organization.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Mossarat Qadeem in Pakistan says of the state intelligence apparatus, “They are the ‘invisible eyes’; the network is strong and keeps strict watch on people working on issues of violent extremism.”<sup>22</sup>

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17. These five categories are drawn from CIASE’s pioneering action research investigating the dimensions of security from a feminist perspective. Health and safety in each area is achieved through taking corresponding action to care and protect. The findings and forthcoming indicators were derived in consultation with diverse groups of women across the territories and communities of Colombia and will be validated internationally in consultation with the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL).

18. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.



## Types of threats faced by women peacebuilders<sup>23</sup>

	Physical	Emotional	Political	Economic	Spiritual
Personal	<p>Targeted attacks, torture, and assassination</p> <p>Imprisonment, abduction, or enforced disappearance</p> <p>Sexual assault, rape, and acid attacks</p> <p>Harassment, surveillance, intimidation, and stalking, including online (e.g., doxing)</p> <p>Travel ban, deportation, or exile</p> <p>Attacks on, surveillance, or destruction of home or personal property</p>	<p>Burn out</p> <p>Secondary trauma</p> <p>Psychological conditions (e.g., PTSD, anxiety, etc.)</p> <p>Targeting, manipulation, and resulting deterioration of personal relationships.</p> <p>Threats of physical attacks.</p>	<p>Revocation or non-renewal of identification or travel documents</p> <p>Revocation of nationality or citizenship</p> <p>Legal harassment through nuisance lawsuits</p> <p>Defamation in the media, on social media or by word of mouth</p>	<p>Bank accounts frozen or assets seized</p> <p>Employment terminated or licenses suspended/denied</p> <p>Blackmail or bribery</p> <p>Refusal of service, housing, or employment</p> <p>Undue taxes, fees, or fines imposed</p> <p>Unreasonable bail terms</p>	<p>Questioning of faith or accusations of blasphemy</p> <p>Denial of religious rites</p>
Organizational	<p>Attacks on, surveillance or vandalism of organizational premises/property</p> <p>Raids on premises and theft/seizure of property, including equipment and records</p> <p>Cyber-attacks, hacking and surveillance of online activity</p>	<p>Brain drain, burn out and rapid turnover of staff</p> <p>Threats of physical attacks</p>	<p>Revocation or denial of licensure or permission to operate</p> <p>Restricted access to certain geographic areas or communities</p> <p>Slander</p>	<p>Bank accounts frozen or assets seized</p> <p>Unreasonable taxes, fees, or fines imposed</p> <p>Funding withdrawn or denied without reasonable cause</p>	<p>Accusations of sectarian affiliations or “foreign” agenda inconsistent with religious or cultural norms</p>
Environmental	<p>General insecurity</p> <p>Widespread surveillance</p>	<p>Stigma against psychological conditions and their treatment</p> <p>Prevalence of conspiracy theories and extremist ideologies</p>	<p>Restrictive laws or regulations imposed on civil society</p> <p>Denial of access to public information/records</p> <p>Travel visa restrictions</p>	<p>Widespread corruption and impunity</p> <p>Poor social safety net</p> <p>Restrictions on foreign funding</p>	<p>Religious, cultural or other forms of discrimination</p>

23. Digital threats cut across all categories, as any of these can take place online, and be amplified by social media. Emotional and Spiritual threats are often the intended result or byproduct of targeted attacks and threats of a physical, political, or economic nature. While they may not manifest as distinct threats from an external source, the emotional and spiritual dimension of threats is very real and equally dangerous to women peacebuilders' health and work.

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## Weaponization of Sexuality and Culture

Threats to women peacebuilders are highly gendered in nature, using their identity, roles, and social norms against them. Whether or not women actively use their traditional gender roles to build peace, simply being a woman peacebuilder challenges patriarchal institutions and attitudes even if consistent with historical and cultural precedent, as is often the case. It inherently involves questioning power relations. The threats and violence that target women peacebuilders go to the heart of cultural norms and values to undermine their social capital. Perpetrators may target the spouse, children, parents or even colleagues of women peacebuilders because of perceptions and recognition of the value of women's relationships.

Sexualized threats use women's bodies and sexuality to repress their activities, by forcing them to contend with the stigma and elevated vulnerability associated with behavior or characteristics considered shameful by broader society. For example, a Nigerian peacebuilder's image was Photoshopped onto a sexualized body to defame her. In Egypt, women police officers have reportedly been instructed to sexually assault women detainees in order to "break their will".<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the omnipresence of the online space, especially social media platforms in particular, has amplified threats because they can elicit mass reactions and crowd-source violence against their target.<sup>25</sup> These platforms have democratized the effort to discredit peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

## The Ambiguity of the Perpetrators

The nature of their work brings women peacebuilders into contact with all sides and all stakeholders in a conflict. In the best of times, this means peacebuilders are the nexus of a web of trusted relationships that serve as the bridge to peace. However, when things go bad, bridges are the first to be burned and women peacebuilders find themselves subject to threats from multiple actors, often of unclear affiliation, and without anyone on their side having their backs. The experiences of women peacebuilders may defy conventional logic when it comes to the relationships and networks that provide protection. In the case of a woman peacebuilder from the Philippines who was kidnapped, related by Jennifer Freeman, her connections with the government and the NGO community made her more insecure in captivity (because they are targets for ransom), while her trusted relationships with Sula leaders helped her.<sup>26</sup> Mossarat Qadeem, Co-Founder of PAIMAN Alumni Trust in Pakistan reflects:

In Taliban-controlled areas such as FATA, I have found extremists to be very principled; until this day they are giving us protection. We do receive threats as a result of deradicalization work, but when they learn that [the deradicalized individuals] are doing something good for their community (e.g. improving women's health) they receive protection. We know how to engage [the Taliban] but not our own state actors.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Nancy Yammout, co-founder and president of Rescue Me Crime Prevention in Lebanon, says, "The extremists were better than the government in supporting us, after building a bond of trust." She reports that an Internal Security Forces (ISF) officer had unreciprocated feelings for her sister and co-founder of Rescue Me, so made it impossible for them to go into the prison where they conduct psychosocial support-based rehabilitation work with extremist prisoners. The officer started a rumor that they were US agents conveying information and framed them as a threat to national security. This led to seven months of legal and administrative battles. When they were allowed to return to their work in the prison, the embassy that would have funded their project backed off.

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24. Consultations, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders" GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

25. Michel Forst, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on his mission to Australia", Human Rights Council, Thirty-Seventh Session, 26 February–23 March 2018, A/HRC/37/51/Add.3, <http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1662890?ln=en>.

26. Consultations, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders" GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

27. Ibid.

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The source of threats can also involve more than one state, especially in the cases of dislocated peacebuilders living in country. When the most recent war in Yemen ignited, Muna Luqman tried to prevent people from mobilizing youth to become fighters, putting herself at risk from the armed groups. She relocated to Egypt for her safety. At the time, she wasn't recognized as a human rights defender or a peacebuilder, only as a humanitarian. But in reality, she says, she was a woman peacebuilder: She evacuated people, created safe zones, and spoke with all sides. Once she was living outside Yemen, the Yemeni government identified her as a threat because she traveled around advocating for peace and calling out the violence on both sides. Then the Government of Yemen limited the rights of certain passport-holders, threatening the residency status of many Yemenis in Egypt. On her return from a peace process meeting in Geneva, the Egyptian authorities refused her entry at the behest of the Yemen embassy and because they were suspicious that she was working on human rights in Egypt, she thinks. They would have detained her had her network not mobilized to get her quickly to Lebanon. There, she was able to leverage her relationships to have her residency reinstated.

In many places, the line is blurred between state entities and non-state armed groups, especially in the case of illicit drug and people trafficking, which incentivizes corrupt alliances. Rudina Çollaku states that as women peacebuilders, "We deal with human trafficking, sex crimes, and narco-trafficking. In trying to protect women we are at risk of being confronted by abusive, criminal men who due to corruption are often associated with a few officials, which makes our work difficult."<sup>28</sup> Femicide and forced disappearance are widespread phenomena in Mexico and, for example, are often perpetrated or enabled by police. Those who seek justice for the victims and systemic change to prevent future violence are threatened, sometimes by actors belonging to the very institutions they are supposed to turn to for protection. From Nigeria to the Philippines to the United States, the police and military are often not experienced as sources of protection but rather as causes of insecurity for all or some segments of the population. This can compound conflict dynamics if it is not already a root cause.

## When Peace(building) is Stigmatized

In contexts where there is no declared conflict, peacebuilders face an additional challenge. Seeking peace may not be seen as a valid pursuit and security may be considered solely the purview of state actors. Qadeem elaborates on the effect of this on her work in Pakistan:

In countries like ours, where the government says there is no conflict, they call it a 'law and order' situation and only security agencies control these problems. I feel threatened if I call myself a peacebuilder. The state needs to recognize different forms of conflict as well as the role of a woman peacebuilder. We experience more threats from security agencies because the government has put all power into the hands of security agencies to control and oppress anyone who works in the area of preventing violent extremism.<sup>29</sup>

The poor perception or lack of awareness of peace and peacebuilding is both a top-down and bottom-up phenomenon. In the words of Shahrazad Magrabi, "Sometimes we can't use an international framework or even the word peace."<sup>30</sup>

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28. Consultations, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders" GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

29. Ibid.

30. Consultations, Caux Forum "Towards an Inclusive Peace", July 2019.

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While the individual women may be well recognized in their communities, this is rarely as “peacebuilders”. As an Indian woman peacebuilder working in Jammu and Kashmir says, “Local communities have no clue as to who is a peacebuilder... I am seen as an activist. India never mentions peace.” From next door former Maldivian cabinet minister and President of Addu Women’s Association Dr. Mariyam Shakeela reflects,

Peace cannot be assumed to have been established in the absence of weaponry. Conflict cannot be defined with the presence of arms. In the Maldives, infiltration of radical thinking, social divisions, and toxic political turmoil has paved the way to violence, harassment, murders, human trafficking, and social issues of immense significance. There is a huge need to create harmony and build peace. Yet very few people dare to call themselves peacebuilders for fear of being labeled negatively and falsely accused. I have worked for peace in different forums and always discreetly and tactfully, but until recently I never called myself a peacebuilder. Let us recognize that the Maldives is in need of peacebuilding at this moment and women can play a significant and important role as gentle giants who can bring about the required transformation.<sup>31</sup>

In post-conflict contexts in which one side prevailed and there was not a negotiated political settlement, peacebuilding is also likely to be stigmatized and its legitimacy challenged. During the war in Sri Lanka, people on both sides wanted to talk with women peacebuilders. In 2009, after the government had “won the war”, they felt their position was threatened by peacebuilders who broached the subject of power-sharing. Even human rights defenders questioned how women peacebuilders could speak to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In 2014, Visaka Dharmadasa, the mother of a disappeared soldier and founder of the Association of War Affected Women (AWAW), was threatened that she would be destroyed. She remarks, “We are threatening to people who look at peace in a different way.”<sup>32</sup>

*“I feel threatened if I call myself a peacebuilder.”*

*— Mossarat Qadeem, PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Pakistan*

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31. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

32. Ibid.





# PROTECTING WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

As discussed, women peacebuilders face numerous, compounding, and gendered threats to their safety and security. Threats can be physical, emotional, political, economic, or spiritual in nature and take place at the personal, organizational, or environmental level, both online and off. The source of threats is often unknown, and they may come from multiple actors at once. State and non-state actors alike can pose both intentional and inadvertent harm to women peacebuilders through the ways they engage or overlook women peacebuilders.

Despite 20 years of policy, practice, and evidence of impact, there is still a persistent gap in recognition of, support to, and protection for women peacebuilders.<sup>33</sup> In 2019, the UN Security Council acknowledged these issues in Resolution 2493, which

Strongly encourages Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors and those who protect and promote human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them.<sup>34</sup>

Ensuring compliance with this commitment is an urgent matter. States seeking to support women peacebuilders and their work must adopt approaches consistent with the “Do No Harm” principle. All states bear primary responsibility for the protection of all individuals within their jurisdiction. They must adhere to international humanitarian law due diligence in meeting their legal obligations to provide security and protect against human rights violations and abuses committed by state and non-state actors, including sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>35</sup> The following sections summarize our analysis of the existing policies and practices available to protect women peacebuilders, identify gaps and opportunities, and provide the rationale for the practical guidance in the final part of this publication.

## Building a Legal and Political Safety Net

There is no mention of peacebuilders or their protection needs in existing international and legal mechanisms, apart from the brief reference noted above in paragraph 6 of UNSC Resolution 2493. No international guidelines exist to protect women peacebuilders as a group. While “WHRDs have well-documented threats, policy frameworks, and urgent action response mechanisms; their work is public facing which lends itself to certain risks and solutions. There is not very much research on women peacebuilders or a shared definition,” says Jennifer Freeman.<sup>36</sup> Existing guidelines<sup>37</sup> for women human rights defenders (WHRDs) may not be fully implemented, relevant or accessible to women peacebuilders.

While women peacebuilders may also identify as WHRDs and promote human rights, there are also important distinctions between them based on the nature of their work. Freeman continues, “A key distinction is that WHRDs call out perpetrators and seek accountability whereas women peacebuilders seek out those violating human rights and engage for a shared future. When it comes to risk and response, this means that what helps one can harm the other.”<sup>38</sup>

33. This initiative is part of the ICAN and WASL She Builds Peace campaign and call to action to stand with women peacebuilders. Our goal is to ensure that women peacebuilders are safe and protected, that governments fulfill their obligations to include them in peace and security decision making, and that women peacebuilders are appreciated and resourced to continue their critical work.

34. UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 2493 (2019) [reaffirming commitment on women and peace and security], 29 October 2019, S/RES/2493 (2000), available at: [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2493\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2493(2019)).

35. For a relevant discussion of International Humanitarian Law and the Responsibility to Protect see the Australian Red Cross handbook: [https://www.red-cross.org.au/getmedia/d0338aa5-27c9-4de9-92ce-45e4c8f4d825/IHL-R2P-responsibility-to-protect.pdf.aspx#:~:text=The%20Responsibility%20to%20Protect%20\(R2P,cleansing%20and%20crimes%20against%20humanity](https://www.red-cross.org.au/getmedia/d0338aa5-27c9-4de9-92ce-45e4c8f4d825/IHL-R2P-responsibility-to-protect.pdf.aspx#:~:text=The%20Responsibility%20to%20Protect%20(R2P,cleansing%20and%20crimes%20against%20humanity).

36. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

37. For example the policy on UK Support for Human Rights Defenders: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/819299/UK-Support-for-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819299/UK-Support-for-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf), and the OSCE Guidelines for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/1/119633.pdf>.

38. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

The UN Declaration for Human Rights Defenders, the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders<sup>39</sup>, and case-specific legal mechanisms exist within international law to protect human rights defenders. However, they do not explicitly cover peacebuilders, and they vary in the extent to which they are also gender responsive. Furthermore, the lack of practical guidance on the implementation and enforcement of existing strategies and guidelines is a barrier to action for the protection of women peacebuilders.

These international gaps are mirrored at the national level. In many countries, women, peace and security (WPS) legislation—including prioritizing the protection of women peacebuilders—either does not exist or, if it does, there are no budgets, implementation plans, accountability mechanisms or relevant monitoring tools.

### **The impracticality and counter-productivity of counterterrorism laws**

The slew of counterterrorism laws, especially regarding “material support” to U.S. designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), is a key threat to women peacebuilders and others engaged in peacebuilding and mediation.<sup>40</sup> These laws and other security provisions inhibit the work of women peacebuilders by criminalizing engagement with certain stakeholders or parties to a conflict. The breadth of the material support prohibition within the U.S. counterterrorism framework has made it prohibitive if not impossible for many women peacebuilders to even engage in dialogue with individuals potentially associated with FTOs, including returnees who may have been abducted and indoctrinated against their will.<sup>41</sup>

For those who receive U.S. government funding, the conditions become impossible. In the case of Visaka Dharmadasa in Sri Lanka, the unreasonable requirements of the provision resulted in her suspending a US-AID-funded project because she couldn’t and wouldn’t certify that each tea house she stopped off at along the road between cities was free of ties to the LTTE.<sup>42</sup>

Not being able to fund and engage with initiatives such as Dharmadasa’s is a great loss to the foreign policy of the United States. By nature, women peacebuilders will reach across barricades in order to bring all parties to the table. Their independent, non-partisan approaches and ability to talk to anyone is an essential quality of their work, which is in line with humanitarian principles and protected under international humanitarian law.

*“The concept of being a peacebuilder is not there...even those who work in human rights think they cannot also be peacebuilders. You don’t see mechanisms specific to peacebuilders.”*

*— Somali human rights defender and peacebuilder*

39. Ensuring Protection - *European Union Guidelines On Human Rights Defenders*, adopted by the Council of the EU in 2004 and updated in 2008, available at: [http://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu\\_guidelines\\_hrd\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_guidelines_hrd_en.pdf).

40. See: Charity & Security Network, *The Prohibition on Material Support and Its Impacts on Nonprofits*, Issue Brief, July 2019, <http://charityandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/material%20support%20issue%20brief%202019.pdf>; and, Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program, *Tightening the Purse Strings: What Countering Terrorism Financing Costs Gender Equality and Security*, 2017.

41. The United States Supreme Court has concluded that Congress had intended to prevent aid to FTOs, even if for facilitating peace negotiations or UN processes, because that assistance falls under the definition of material aid. The finding was based on the principle that any assistance could help “legitimate” the groups. For more details on the ruling and its impact see: “Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project”, Global Freedom of Expression, Columbia University, <http://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/holder-v-humanitarian-law-project/>.

42. Email correspondence with the authors, September 2019.



## Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Threats on the Ground

Nearly all stakeholders, states, multilateral organizations, and international and national civil society organizations—and local women peacebuilders themselves—lack the adequate systems to identify and respond to the threats to women peacebuilders. In theory, all threats and security incidents should be taken seriously and investigated fully, activating referral mechanisms with clear roles, responsibilities, and paths of communication enabling women peacebuilders to access them. In practice, however, the threats to women peacebuilders are often not detected because of a lack of recognition and monitoring. They are not reported as human rights violations because of lack of awareness of the human rights architecture among local actors and cumbersome processes. Amid exacerbated risk, establishing protection mechanisms on the ground that strengthen and leverage relationships between state and multilateral allies and women peacebuilders is key. However, women peacebuilders and their organizations mostly lack the skills or resources to conduct holistic and gendered risk assessments. They are accustomed to taking risks far beyond what other actors would ever consider. For the most part, local actors go without elaborate security plans and protocols, unlike their international counterparts. Technical, financial, and normative support are vital to encourage women peacebuilders to make their own protection a priority.

Even the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), a massive social movement that provides local communities and especially young people with a cause and opportunity to do something positive for their communities, is contending with the erosion of norms protecting civilians on the ground in crisis settings. According to Dr. Amjad Saleem, manager of the Protection, Inclusion and Engagement team at IFRC, though they establish trust with different communities and stakeholders as they seek humanitarian access, they don't refer to themselves as peacebuilders because peacebuilding is seen as political and they are bound by humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.<sup>43</sup>

However, even the humanitarians of the Red Cross and Red Crescent are no longer immune to attack. Over the last ten years, 150 volunteers have been killed in action.<sup>44</sup> As Naraghi Anderlini says, "Peace is militarized. On the ground using labels can be dangerous, so you use no terms or whatever terms you need to do the work, but peacebuilders still need to be recognized."<sup>45</sup>

While celebrating and publicizing the work of women peacebuilders, you must take care to do no harm. Share drafts of materials, obtain explicit approval before publication, and conduct an analysis of the risk to them of associating your organization with them and their work. Showing appreciation for them and their work as a cohort and vital pillar of society, especially in divided societies, is one way to elevate women peacebuilders without endangering anyone.

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43. Consultations, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders" GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

## Security at the Peace Table and in International Spaces

Peace processes at the Track One level, including conflict prevention, negotiation, mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction, are still designed primarily with mediators, states, and armed groups and without recognizing civil society and those who have a vested interest in peace. Women peacebuilders represent their communities and bring critical information and expertise to other stakeholders at the table. Including women peacebuilders in peace processes and other international spaces enhances global peace and security, provides due recognition of their work, and elevates their concerns and priorities.

Women peacebuilders who have opportunities to participate in international spaces, like UN-led peace processes or briefings of the UN Security Council, usually enter such spaces without being provided the background of the high-level officials they are to engage, established guidelines for the discussion, or the chance to consider related risks. Muna Luqman, who has previously briefed the UN Security Council, says, “People extract information from women peacebuilders but then some women peacebuilders lose their jobs or don’t get funding” if they don’t toe the line when speaking publicly at the invitation of the purse- and pen-holding entities.<sup>46</sup> The inviting entity to any talks must assume responsibility for the safety of peacebuilders and co-design the process and necessary protection plans.

All participants of delegations to peace talks or other international convenings, including women peacebuilders, should be provided with commensurate security measures building on a security risk-assessment. “There is support in research that the security of women is a better predictor of stability than women’s inclusion,” says Charlotte Isaksson, Gender Advisor at the European External Action Service. “We need to contrast the lack of security for women peacebuilders with the fact that other actors and interests can get almost any security they want.”<sup>47</sup> We would argue that in a world where an estimated \$180 billion is spent on private security annually,<sup>48</sup> a portion of that should be reallocated by governments to provide for the security needs of women peacebuilders to enable them to contribute to peace and security decision-making, both when travelling to give their valuable insights and expertise—almost always without remuneration—as well as when operating locally.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, careful attention to doing no harm is particularly relevant here, as seemingly minor oversights, such as the circulation of personal contact information without permission, can pose a grave risk to peacebuilders both while abroad and when they return home. In addition, visa status, for example restricting movement to the UN and vicinity, can inhibit the ability to meet with supporters and travel if at risk. Conveners and hosts have an obligation to accompany women peacebuilders throughout their engagement abroad, and to support them in the appropriate dissemination of results from peace processes and international events when they return home.

## When Emergency Relocation and Assistance is Necessary

Too often, women peacebuilders face such extreme threats to their safety that governments and international organizations struggle to protect them in their communities. In such cases, they may need to relocate either internally or outside of their country.

Unfortunately, for most women peacebuilders it is nearly impossible to relocate temporarily given visa and financial requirements so, as one Somali peacebuilder and WHRD who was forced to flee for her life—first to Uganda and then Europe—says, “the only other option is to become a refugee”. However, seeking asylum is felt as a huge loss for most because they, like her, “Have a dream to help my people and bring peace.”<sup>50</sup>

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46. “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

47. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

48. Claire Provost, “The industry of inequality: why the world is obsessed with private security”, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/may/12/industry-of-inequality-why-world-is-obsessed-with-private-security>.

49. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

50. Ibid.





While women peacebuilders qualify for some emergency grants and programs that exist to help facilitate relocation, usually under the umbrella of WHRDs, these are seriously limited in scope and scale. For instance, cycles for emergency grants may only occur every 3-4 months and often take too long to process. Programs offer relocation only for the individual at risk, without provision for family or partner accompaniment, or consideration of colleagues who may be at risk by association. Existing programs also focus primarily on the physical and perhaps political threats and protection needs, neglecting the emotional, economic and spiritual dimensions. As the Somali peacebuilder reflects, “The first thing you need is psychosocial support, which is usually not provided.”<sup>51</sup>

The experts and advocates who operate these programs are aware of their limitations and are trying to respond more holistically. According to African Defenders, “Relocation is considered as a last resort option when all the support systems in the country have failed to protect an HRD. We ensure that individuals or groups defending human rights are safe but not silent. Our support mechanism varies from psychosocial care, family support, legal assistance, fellowship or internship placements and educational support.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the challenge of peacebuilding from afar, while not impossible, is immense, and can mean the end of community-based work for women peacebuilders in exile.

*“We need to contrast the lack of security for women peacebuilders with the fact that other actors and interests can get almost any security they want.”*

— *Charlotte Isaksson, Gender Advisor,  
European External Action Service*

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51. Consultations, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders” GSX Workshop, London, February 2020.

52. Ibid.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women peacebuilders work to build peace, justice, and security in their communities in the most difficult, conflict-affected environments and at enormous personal and professional risk. Their work is dangerous by nature because they challenge established power dynamics and engage across differences. They build bridges between conflicting groups and develop trust and credibility with all stakeholders, including violent actors on multiple sides; relationships can help protect women peacebuilders, but can also directly or indirectly endanger them and their work. As a result of their critical role, like bridges, women peacebuilders are often the first to be targeted by parties seeking to perpetuate conflict. Rosa Emilia Salamanca has first-hand experience of these dynamics in Colombia:

We have to learn how to live together, and in such a polarized society the main issue is to make people realize that. The context is complex; we know we have a peace agreement, but some would say that peace has divided us, some are closing ranks so that nothing will change. In other words, those involved in conflict are coming together to undo what women peacebuilders are doing to gain peace.<sup>53</sup>

The following recommendations provide practical guidance for states and multilateral organizations to contribute to the safety of women peacebuilders by reducing risk, preventing threats to them and their work, and responding effectively to provide protection.

To facilitate understanding and implementation, the guidance is organized in four sections outlining what to do and making specific suggestions as to how to do it. Each set of guidance varies in relevance to different branches, departments, agencies, and units of states and multilateral organizations. The recommendations are designed to be specific enough to operationalize while broad enough to be applied by different entities.



- 1. Building a Legal and Political Safety Net for Women Peacebuilders** addresses gaps in international, national and institutional policy and culture that make women peacebuilders vulnerable.
- 2. Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Threats to Women Peacebuilders on the Ground** outlines steps that can be taken to reduce risk of, prepare for and respond to threats, harassment and attacks they face in the course of their lives and work within their communities and society.
- 3. Security for Women Peacebuilders at the Peace Table and in International Spaces** addresses the particular issues around and needs of women peacebuilders to ensure their safe participation in international events such as peace negotiations and briefings.
- 4. When Emergency Relocation and Assistance for Women Peacebuilders is Necessary** outlines actions to facilitate emergency relocation and assistance for women peacebuilders, as needed, in the case of acute threats.

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53. Consultations, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders" GSX Workshop, London, February 2020

## Operational Guidance to Establish and Enhance the Protection of Women Peacebuilders

### Building a Legal and Political Safety Net for Women Peacebuilders

 WHAT TO DO	 HOW TO DO IT
<p><b>1.</b> Build mutually beneficial relationships with women peacebuilders; networks can serve as a form of protection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include the recognition and safety of women peacebuilders explicitly in the mandate of gender and WPS focal points, where they exist, including those in government ministries and foreign and multilateral missions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where missing, establish WPS focal points within all state and multilateral entities to carry out this mandate.</li> <li>• Strengthen the role of and resource WPS and gender focal points.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Conduct regular bilateral consultations with women peacebuilders, their organizations, and their networks to understand their work and the risks and threats they face:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following best practices,<sup>54</sup> ensure the inclusion of women peacebuilders from different geographic areas and diverse identities including race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic backgrounds.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● With their consent, attend women peacebuilders' events and observe their activities to become familiar with their work and to fulfill vetting requirements.</li> <li>● Facilitate collaboration between WHRDs and women peacebuilders by ensuring inclusive criteria for participation where possible and mutual reinforcement of their work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b> Support the development of security sector policies and procedures to clarify roles and responsibilities and strengthen coordination mechanisms to respond to threats against women peacebuilders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish and facilitate open channels of communication with the security sector, including local liaison officers and protection specialists, and referral mechanisms that are accessible to women peacebuilders.</li> <li>● Develop Minimum Security Operating Standards (MSOS), designed to establish standard criteria for security arrangements to ensure the safety of women peacebuilders.</li> </ul>

54. See, for example, the Beyond Consultations tool: <https://beyondconsultations.org>.

<p><b>3.</b> Highlight the risks and threats women peacebuilders face, giving priority to their analysis as they are experts on their own situation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incorporate the expertise of women peacebuilders in context analyses, particularly those focused on conflict, stabilization, humanitarian response, development, and violence prevention.</li> <li>● Conduct joint risk assessments with women peacebuilders and co-design and implement mitigation strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply a gender responsive, intersectional approach to identify risks, vulnerabilities, and threats.</li> <li>• Develop targeted strategies to promote acceptance of women peacebuilders' work and reduce threats.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Leverage convening power to foster alliances between women peacebuilders and other stakeholders (including state entities, multilateral organizations, and civil society) to raise awareness of and enable robust responses to threats.</li> <li>● Engage technology companies to educate them about the online threats and attacks faced by women peacebuilders and to enhance protocols for limiting, reporting, and when appropriate, removing harmful online content.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.</b> Revise existing international and national laws, policies and guidelines for the protection of human rights and women human rights defenders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly include women peacebuilders;</li> <li>• Ensure provisions are gender-responsive; and</li> <li>• Address the specific risks associated with the nature of women's peacebuilding work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include the rights and security of women peacebuilders explicitly in the mandate of national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and ensure that they are empowered to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and report on the situation of women peacebuilders, specifically;</li> <li>• Coordinate the state's response to threats against them; and</li> <li>• Periodically evaluate the efficacy of the state's response.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Regularly engage international human rights treaty bodies to raise concerns about the safety of women peacebuilders and report on threats and violence against them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Violence Against Women, Extra-judicial Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Torture, and the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism to report on the insecurity of women peacebuilders off and online.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Develop implementation plans for policies and guidelines, where needed, to inform national legislation and enable change in practices.</li> </ul>





<p><b>5.</b> Enact legislation<sup>55</sup> institutionalizing WPS policies and practices, including provisions for the protection of women peacebuilders that include allocation of resources, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Develop an inclusive consultative process to draft WPS legislation in close collaboration with women peacebuilders, policymakers and parliamentarians.</li><li>● Map the relevant laws, policies and practices to identify key entry points, source material and key stakeholders.</li><li>● Identify or develop example language for use in legislation and share best practices for gender responsive policymaking and budgeting.</li><li>● Write inclusive, consultative processes into legislation, such as regular staff briefings by women peacebuilders, as well as implementation plans, monitoring mechanisms and reporting requirements.</li></ul>
<p><b>6.</b> Revise existing laws that aid in the criminalization, prohibition, or stifling of women peacebuilders and their work, particularly counterterrorism laws.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Advocate bilaterally and within global and regional coordination bodies to ensure that international and national counterterrorism laws and policies enable peacebuilding and protect women peacebuilders.</li><li>● Engage authorities responsible for implementing Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing (AML/CTF) rules to familiarize them with women peacebuilders, their organizations and activities in order to prevent and redress limitations on their work.</li></ul>

55. The United States Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 is the first example of this approach: <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20170925/S1141.pdf>. For a discussion of its potential as a model see: Jamille Biglio and Melanne Vermeer, "With the Women, Peace, and Security Act, Washington Could Be a Model for the World", Foreign Policy, July 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/22/women-peace-security-act-oversight-hearing-equality/>.



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## WHAT NOT TO DO

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- Do not threaten women peacebuilders, their families, their colleagues, or their work.
- Do not isolate women peacebuilders by excluding them from key political and policy arenas.
- Do not ignore women peacebuilders' perspectives in conflict analysis and security assessments.
- Do not assume that existing protection mechanisms are sufficient to meet women peacebuilders' needs or that women peacebuilders identify as WHRDs.
- Do not adopt WPS policies and plans without having made a gender and risk analysis aiming to enhance the safety and security of women peacebuilders.
- Do not adopt WPS policies and plans without accompanying and enforceable legislation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms and dedicated resources.
- Do not criminalize women peacebuilders or constrain their work through unwarranted legal and administrative proceedings.
- Do not instrumentalize women peacebuilders and securitize their work by using them as an intelligence source in support of interventions unaligned with a human security approach.



## Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Threats to Women Peacebuilders on the Ground

 WHAT TO DO	 HOW TO DO IT
<p><b>7.</b> Establish protection guidelines and protocols for engagement with women peacebuilders to reduce risk and enable response to threats as they arise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Designate a protection focal point within each organization or entity (e.g., embassy, mission, ministry) to coordinate responses in the event of an acute threat. This could be the WPS or gender focal point, or a security or protection officer, depending on the structure and staffing of the organization.</li><li>● Conduct a risk assessment, in consultation with women peacebuilders, before making the relationship public or engaging other stakeholders.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take special care when hosting visiting delegations (e.g., UNSC, UNOCT).</li></ul></li><li>● In advance of events or activities, share details on the venue, all participants, and topics.</li><li>● Respect confidentiality, unless explicitly waived.</li><li>● Maintain contact to provide support in case adverse consequences arise.</li><li>● Inform women peacebuilders of the applicable guidelines and protocols and share related documents so they know what to expect.</li></ul>
<p><b>8.</b> Accompany women peacebuilders as they seek protection from and justice for threats against them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Provide physical accompaniment, as needed, including hosting woman peacebuilders in the organization's premises (i.e., embassy, mission, residence, office).</li><li>● Monitor the status of investigations and prosecution of perpetrators of threats and inform women peacebuilders of the progress of the cases.</li><li>● In the case a women peacebuilder is detained (by state or non-state actors) and/or prosecuted:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monitor the conditions of her detention and treatment and provide legal, political, financial, and moral support, when possible, to her and her family.</li><li>• Monitor the case closely, advocate for due process at a minimum and negotiate release if possible.</li><li>• Vouch for her and her work, as needed.</li></ul></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coordinate protection efforts with all stakeholders on the ground including, as appropriate: government ministries; diplomatic missions; humanitarian and development organizations; UN protection clusters; UNOHCHR country offices, special procedures and visiting delegations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider establishing a joint-action mechanism, inter-agency working group, or other standing body.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>9. Support building the capacity and capability of law enforcement actors and the state to coordinate and enhance their response to threats and evaluate the efficacy of the response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Train law enforcement, including local police, and the judiciary on the protection needs of women peacebuilders, off and online, to inform risk assessments, design of security arrangements, and prosecution of perpetrators.</li> <li>● Exchange good practices to improve response, investigation and prosecution of specific threats and security incidents against women peacebuilders.</li> <li>● Strengthen inter-agency and inter-sectoral coordination to streamline exchange of information, learning, and collaboration to protect women peacebuilders.</li> </ul>
<p>10. Support building the capacity and capability of women peacebuilders and their organizations to conduct risk assessments, develop security plans and protocols, and mitigate and respond to threats in order to increase their safety and resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support women peacebuilders to identify, strengthen, and where needed, develop collective protection mechanisms for individuals, families, and organizations at the local, regional and national levels.</li> <li>● Support the development and provision of gender responsive security and protection training for women peacebuilders, including physical security, digital security, and well-being.</li> <li>● Facilitate the development of comprehensive mechanisms to communicate accurate threat information in real-time, between local communities, security actors, and other relevant stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<p>11. Recognize and show appreciation for women peacebuilders and their work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Credit women peacebuilders publicly to raise the profile of their work, if deemed safe and beneficial to do so after consultation with and approval by them.</li> <li>● Build and leverage strategic relationships with the media to raise the visibility and recognition of women peacebuilders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support training for journalists in gender responsive and conflict-sensitive reporting.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Establish and give awards to women peacebuilders who would benefit from public recognition.</li> </ul>




- Champion and support women peacebuilders using low-profile approaches, or by elevating them and their work generically as a group, as needed to avoid exacerbating risk to individuals.



## WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not ignore, neglect, or generate any threats or reports concerning the safety of women peacebuilders, their families, and/or their organizations.
- Do not assume that there are no security incidents if mechanisms to identify and report them do not exist.
- Do not ignore or respond to incidents on an ad hoc basis; do not delay investigations; and do not withhold information on incidents from women peacebuilders and the public.
- Do not engage media or other stakeholders without first consulting with women peacebuilders.
- Do not assume women peacebuilders have the capacity and resources to implement protection protocols.
- Do not overlook the protection needs of women peacebuilders because they do not fit into the categories of actors as defined by existing frameworks.

## Security for Women Peacebuilders at the Peace Table and in International Spaces<sup>56</sup>

 WHAT TO DO	 HOW TO DO IT
<p><b>12.</b> Consider and mitigate risks to women peacebuilders when designing peace processes, briefings, and other international events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consult women peacebuilders to inform determinations about where, with whom, and how the proceedings will be conducted (i.e., choice of venue, selection of participants, and participation guidelines).</li> <li>● Share objectives, background of all participants, and participation guidelines with women peacebuilders in advance.</li> <li>● Facilitate access to visas, negotiating with the host country for the least restrictive provisions.</li> <li>● Ensure that women peacebuilders are provided security arrangements commensurate with those afforded other briefers, delegates or participants, at minimum:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicate a budget line to fund the security of participating women peacebuilders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Facilitate proxy representation or virtual participation if women peacebuilders are unable to attend in person due to security risks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>13.</b> Develop gender responsive security guidelines for engaging women peacebuilders as briefers, delegates and participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct event specific risk assessments with women peacebuilders to inform security guidelines and arrangements.</li> <li>● Establish a clear duty of care, specifying who will be responsible for each task during events.</li> <li>● Facilitate secure communications in line with current best practices, including use of encrypted devices and platforms as needed.</li> <li>● Facilitate secure transportation as needed and in coordination with security experts (e.g. armored vehicles, private car service, daytime travel itineraries).</li> <li>● Provide physical accompaniment, as needed.</li> </ul>

56. For more on why and how to include women peacebuilders in peace processes, see ICAN's "Operational Guidance to Guarantee the Participation of Women Peacebuilders in Track One Peace Processes", October 2020.







<b>14.</b> Establish and implement rules of engagement for the proceedings to ensure respectful communication and treatment of women peacebuilders, both off and online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Conveners should set ground rules and discuss them in advance, confirming the agreement of all participants.</li><li>● Conveners and facilitators must have the authority and accountability mechanisms to enforce them.</li></ul>
<b>15.</b> Ensure women peacebuilders' participation is adequately funded to alleviate economic insecurity, which exacerbates risks and vulnerabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Provide flexible funding for women peacebuilders to use as they see fit to facilitate their safe participation.</li><li>● Remunerate women peacebuilders for their contributions and expertise.</li></ul>
<b>16.</b> Sustain support for women peacebuilders and their participation following the proceedings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Support women peacebuilders to report back to their communities on the proceedings and their outcomes in order to reinforce their credibility.</li><li>● Disseminate copies of outcome documents and agreements to key stakeholders.</li><li>● Monitor for breaches of protocol, both off and online, and enforce agreed rules of engagement.</li></ul>



## WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not invite women peacebuilders into international spaces without providing them with the full details about the participants, agenda, and security protocols.
- Do not make assumptions about the risks women peacebuilders face and do not neglect their protection concerns, or those of their family members or organizations.
- Do not share their personal contact information without their permission, as this jeopardizes their safety both while abroad and when they return home.
- Do not expect or burden women peacebuilders to raise funds and do not assume that they will access visas.
- Do not leave women peacebuilders without a follow-up plan.

## When Emergency Assistance and Relocation of Women Peacebuilders is Necessary

 WHAT TO DO	 HOW TO DO IT
<p><b>17.</b> Facilitate emergency support to women peacebuilders in the form of physical accompaniment, political advocacy, financial grants, and security arrangements, as needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct a security assessment jointly with the woman peacebuilder under threat to determine her specific needs.</li> <li>● Dedicate funding to enable rapid response to acute threats.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify existing budget lines and/or establish an internal fund that can be used to support responses as needed.</li> <li>• Establish a flexible funding mechanism to grant financial support to women peacebuilders under threat.<sup>57</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>● Establish diplomatic dialogue and advocate with relevant authorities or actors to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilize law enforcement and security actors to take action; and</li> <li>• Defuse threats, if the source of the threat is reachable.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Communicate solidarity with and support of women peacebuilders, by issuing public statements and sharing women peacebuilders' messages, in coordination with them and their networks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>18.</b> Revise and expand existing emergency response mechanisms for WHRDs to address gaps in assistance available to women peacebuilders and establish new mechanisms where appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure women peacebuilders can meet eligibility criteria, given the often low-profile and unofficial nature of their work.</li> <li>● Conduct security and needs assessments with women peacebuilders under threat to tailor responses.</li> </ul> <p>Provide comprehensive support—including legal, political, financial, logistical, and psychological aid as needed—during emergencies and throughout any relocation process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include the family members of women peacebuilders in security arrangements and relocation options. Included family members should be determined by women peacebuilders themselves, and not based on external definitions of who qualifies as immediate family.</li> <li>● Connect women peacebuilders with international organizations, networks, and diaspora communities to facilitate their transition and enable continuation of their work.</li> </ul>

57. See ICAN's forthcoming brief and operational guidance on funding women peacebuilders for further guidance on flexible funding mechanisms, to be released in November 2020.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Maintain contact and periodically reassess needs and risk, to determine whether and when it is safe for her to return home.</li></ul>
<b>19.</b> Expand sustainable options for temporary relocation of women peacebuilders within their country and abroad.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Support the development of peer-to-peer emergency response and relocation initiatives within existing national and international networks of women peacebuilders, and provide sustained aid to support their interventions.</li><li>● Develop visa policies and procedures to allow women peacebuilders to relocate abroad temporarily without having to resort to asylum:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Expand existing visa categories, such as humanitarian, student, and business programs, to apply to the various and distinct circumstances of women peacebuilders under threat.</li><li>● Consult states that have established or adapted such visas, for example Ireland's Facilitative Visa Procedure<sup>58</sup>, Spain's Program on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders<sup>59</sup>, and the UK's response to Hong Kong's new security law<sup>60</sup>, which provide precedents.</li><li>● Ensure visa and border officers are trained to recognize women peacebuilders and are familiar with the threats they face.</li></ul></li></ul>

## WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not ignore security incidents or make assumptions about the source of threats against women peacebuilders.
- Do not publicize security concerns or consult others without express consent.
- Do not offer women peacebuilders security arrangements that force a choice between their work, their families, and their safety due to restrictive visa or other provisions.
- Do not rely on existing emergency response mechanisms, which do not sufficiently meet the needs of women peacebuilders.
- Do not penalize women peacebuilders for being forced into exile by delegitimizing them and their work because it is conducted from abroad.

58. Visa for Temporary Relocation of Human Rights Defenders: An EU Tool to Protect Human Rights Defenders at Immediate Risk or in Need of Respite, 2008, 6, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/fd/droi20080123\\_hrd\\_001/DROI20080123\\_HRD\\_001EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/droi20080123_hrd_001/DROI20080123_HRD_001EN.pdf).

59. UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights, "Madrid Launches Its New Program on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders", CISDP, 2018, <http://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/madrid-launches-its-new-program-protection-human-rights-defenders>.

60. Nick Eardley, "Hong Kong: UK Makes Citizenship Offer to Residents", BBC News, July 1, 2020, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53246899>.



*"We're called ICAN because it's very much about what I can do. We have an appetite for trust, as opposed to an appetite for risk, and engage by building trusted relationships and framing things in a positive and proactive way."*

*- Ambassador (Ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley  
United States*